

Mayor Lewis' State of the City Speech

January 23, 2006

We will lead where our leadership is required. We will walk in partnership when we can, and we will follow when necessary.

Over the last four years many of us have been partnering together in so many areas and it is working. We have accomplished many things, but there is much still to be done, and we are doing it the Auburn way - together.

The City of Auburn has been working with the Auburn Downtown Association, the property owners and the businesses downtown. While Project Ace, our hotel/condominium and Water Park, is a start--much like the Transit Center, Justice Center and the Truitt Building--there are more opportunities to be explored. The time has come and we will work together with the business owners in our downtown to continue the work we have started.

We will work for more partnerships downtown, more development in the heart of our community that supports what we want and need in our downtown core.

Downtown Main Street has been lost in so many communities across our nation, but here, in Auburn, it is alive and well, and we know what we want, what we need. We know we want retail business in our downtown. We know we want places to live in our downtown--homes we can be proud of, places for our young professionals and our empty nesters to move into--here in our city's heart. We are committed to working with the property owners in our downtown core and have laid

the foundation through elimination of impact fees, simplification of building and permit codes, and the ten year property tax abatement for multi-family housing---all proofs of the City's willingness to move our community forward.

We are working in partnership with Auburn Regional Medical Center as the hospital campus expands and our partnership there increases. We are working today; we are committed to moving that partnership forward with a plan for the future.

Green River Community College is another partnership that's begun and is just underway. No change has been made yet to bring more people downtown, in part because of the work at the Kent Station. But now, perhaps, our time has come, and this new partnership will bring hundreds of new students, new people to our downtown.

We are committed to working with the Post Office in Auburn, and we will find solutions to the serious parking problem that will be compounded when the new section of A Street SE opens. The Post Office has signaled a willingness to work in community with the City, with the remodeling of their current facility starting in January. Working with our partners at GSA we have found the additional space needed for a Distribution Center so needed for a 21st century Auburn postal facility.

We have committed to a partnership for our neighborhoods so they can decide the future for their own area. The City of Auburn will continue the process of working with a neighborhood community, like Terminal Park and East Main Street, to listen to their wants and needs, and then to develop and implement plans that will include those needs as the basis of an ongoing revitalization plan.

Groups of concerned citizens are working voluntarily with the City on development of the Community Campus at Les Gove Park, a major focus of this City to provide a community center and a central identity for Les Gove Park.

On the other side of town another group of citizens and business leaders came together to work on a new clubhouse at our golf course and provided the leadership and a commitment to move this project forward.

At the same time another group has been working on a master plan for our airport. This year we will open a new access to our airport from B Street, which will open up a whole new portion of our airport for future development.

We have been working with the human service groups in Auburn to define the problems we face and then to make a commitment, together, to find a way to improve our community, to lessen the need, to improve the lives of those members of our community who need our help now, who may be the ones to help us later. We must move together to find a way to bring the community of human service agencies in Auburn into closer proximity to focus all the possible solutions in one place--a multi-service center so that we look at the real needs of every individual and family instead of just treating symptoms without solving the real issues, forever.

But your City must be committed to this process as well, and Council will take the first step this year by adopting goals to improve delivery of services for those in need.

All the while we have been meeting with the pastors of the churches, the leaders in the faith community. I meet with our pastors once a month; sometimes there are only a few, sometimes more, but I would never, ever miss an opportunity to talk to those pastors who care so much for all of our community. I respect and admire their work, and we will continue to support all those who wish to work to improve the lot of all people in our community. I will support all those willing to help all people, and our faith community has led the way these last few years.

From their first leadership effort that started the summer lunch programs, which is now city-wide with the help of the School District, to the volunteer-led English-as-a-Second-Language classes at several locations, and the renovation of one of our worst parks – Cedar Lanes-- they've shouted to the whole community, "We Are Here and We Will Be Involved!" They are here, in the Spirit; our faith community is involved, and we will partner with them. We will work with them on Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation, those twin plagues that have affected our community for, oh, too long. We will work with them for a Free Clinic for those in need, for a centralized agency like Love Inc. and for individual efforts around our community.

We will partner with the neighborhoods invested; not only those blighted with drugs and alcohol abuse, but also with slumlords and dilapidated buildings. There is no shame in being poor. Many of us, especially when we were just getting started, have known poverty. But there is no reason that any citizen of Auburn should live in unhealthy, unsafe living quarters, and your City Council has passed changes in our ordinances--first to license all rental properties, for a license given can be taken away, and then to set up a series of criteria for violations and actions that will be taken to enforce standards in our town. We are

making a difference, and it is the input of the community that aids us in driving this disease from our midst.

The Auburn Area Chamber of Commerce has been at the center of all progress made in this community for more than half a century, and their involvement is just as strong today.

They too had a major part in the renovation of permit and building codes, and supplied the majority of participants for the new city motto and our magnificent new gateway project. The Chamber understands fully that all the groundwork has been laid, the process is done, and we are working with the Chamber's plans, including the new Business Strategies, to bring that business we want to our community. We – together – we have decided where business should be located, what type of business is important to Auburn, and now we are actively engaged in going out and bringing that business home – to Auburn!

We are partnering with Nature herself, with our environmental groups and engineers, as we move forward together to establish Auburn's Environmental Park. Not content with that alone, your City Council is establishing a Green Zone around that area to bring environmentally related businesses-- businesses that can use the Park as a living laboratory, businesses that can bring environmentally sound business practices and development--to our community. It is a partnership of many, dedicated to providing an environmental park in the midst of an urban area. A new concept for a century old City, yet, what better place than Auburn?

The Auburn School District is dedicated to our children, and we are committed to work with them in partnership to keep our children safe

and strong as they learn all that is necessary to take their leadership positions in the future. Safe walking routes, feeding our children during the summer, new language programs, new flashing signs for school zones, and more joint After School programs, including joint use of facilities throughout our community, are an absolute necessity if we are to provide the best for our children. Through our Cities and Schools Forum, the cities of Algona, Auburn and Pacific are making progress, and we are committed to achieving a much higher level of commitment for our children.

We live in an area of earthquakes and lahars, of dams and reservoirs; and we are working with emergency management agencies throughout the Puget Sound Region and beyond. Still, we must make sure we are doing all we can locally, and that is why we have been working toward developing an emergency radio station and emergency telephone notification system for those times of crisis we all hope will never come, but for which we must plan for every day.

We have been working for years on annexation issues to the west and east and south. Because of the ongoing budget constraints that limit our ability to hire additional personnel, we are still trapped by our inability to fund personnel against our need to control the massive development that has been allowed within our Planned Annexation Areas, outside of any City control. We must find new ways to look at the need, new ways to partner with surrounding areas, and all must be a party to these changes so that none lose their future because of them.

Partnership with community every day is part of our commitment to the Muckleshoot Tribal Nation. Now, sometimes we are on the same side of an issue, sometimes we are competitors like good businesses, but we

are as twins, joined together by geography, by the decisions of leaders from times long passed.

We are joined not just by political boundaries, but by family ties, by business, by religion and custom. We will continue to strive to work for better and closer partnerships. We will work together because we must, we will work together because we should, and we will work to help each other for it is the right thing for each of us to do. We are working today in partnership with the Muckleshoot Tribe, the State of Washington Department of Transportation to find solutions to our other even more dangerous roadblock – Highway 164 and Auburn Way South. We have seen the traffic during concerts at the Ampitheatre. We fear what will happen to all the highways in the south end if there is ever a fatality during a concert that closes Auburn Way South for two hours or even more. Even without a fatality we know that the congestion on SR 164 will only grow worse and together we are working in partnership to find solutions.

The Muckleshoot Tribe has a Canoe Journey coming here this summer and as a City we are committed to working with them to show all who will see, all who will listen, that we do work together here in partnership. It's not just an event; it's a chance to show all of our populations, but most especially our children, a different culture and how in our heart of hearts we are all the same.

City-wide we find ourselves in the same financial trap we have talked about for the last four years. Still, the work we have done like every other city in the state towards economic development has helped. While we have been given some breathing room, all of us in government know that we are forever constrained in hiring those we must have for public

safety. We are on a never ending spiral down in our ability to keep up the services that we must provide to our citizens.

Auburn has never chosen the easy path and while we were told by State officials that there would be no change until the citizens were made to 'feel the pain' by reducing service to them, we have remained steadfast in our commitment to improve the service provided by our employees and our fight to keep our current level of service while providing the best customer service anywhere.

Yes, as recently as last month they told us to take the easy way and lay off public safety employees as a way to force awareness upon our citizens. We are still being told every year, I was given this specific instruction by state officials, that the simple way out of our financial problem in the middle of an economic down turn is to raise business and occupation taxes – now, there's a heck of an incentive to move your company here!

We were told to take the easy way, but your City Council and your great group of dedicated City employees have chosen the tougher road, and our commitment to citizen and business alike is firm, yet there must be a partnership there as well, and it is working.

We must have the commitment from our community to be involved, to call 911, to volunteer for the boards and commissions, the youth and senior groups, to join the Police Volunteers, to be responsible business partners and work to make those changes necessary to keep us all safe. This upcoming year will be even more difficult for our public safety departments. Not just because of the limitations on hiring, but because more and more officers are retiring and there are not enough

replacements. Adding to that is the fact that the State Police Academy has not been fully funded so all of us across the state cannot send enough new recruits to the Academy to meet the upcoming crisis.

Our partnerships are not limited to the City and our ties are strong and growing as your City Council continues its involvement. The cities of Algona, Auburn and Pacific work together on a regular basis for all of our citizens. In addition, the newly formed Valley Cities organization, made up of the cities of Fife, Puyallup, Sumner, Algona, Pacific, Auburn, Kent, Renton and Tukwila, share many common features and goals. The industrial cities of the White and Puyallup River valleys contain more than half of all of the industrial capacity of the Puget Sound Region, yet our income base is threatened, our land use provisions have been attacked and the future is not yet secure.

The Valley Cities also share a common road, State Highway 167, which right now is more of a roadblock, forcing both commuter and truck traffic onto our city streets. Our cities have been at the forefront of all the planning for this vital commuter and freight corridor. We know we must have that long planned link up of SR 167 from Puyallup where it currently ends to the entrance to the Port of Tacoma. We know we must have two additional lanes on SR 167 from Puyallup to the 405 interchange.

Today, right now, the political powers around the Sound talk of 'projects' on SR 167 that might begin by - - 2016. Yes, we support transit; we are living proof that transit works. But here in the beating heart of the state's largest industrial area, we need concrete, yes, concrete lanes-- those two additional lanes to put freight back on the road and get it out of our backyards.

The Valley Cities are also working on transit since we are the success story. From Puyallup and Sumner, Kent and Tukwila the trains come and go each morning loaded with commuters from our cities.

We have yet to convince those in Seattle that a good portion of our work force comes from the north into our Valley City area, but those few one-way trains we do have that are running are loaded to capacity. We still await the promised improvements for new parking garages, as ours are full to capacity and, again, cars are spreading out into our neighborhoods instead of in those long promised facilities.

We are proof that working in partnership you can achieve much, and we must work together for more parking facilities, more trains that run both north and south each way, morning and night.

Perhaps one day the time will come when you can take a train to Tacoma or Seattle and come back home again in a few hours at any time of the day. We are proof that if you build it they will come, and we are ready, we are so ready, for much more.

The Valley Cities are also working on the Tri Trail Connection. From Seattle to the south side of Pacific the Interurban Trail is an asphalt trail that can take a walker, jogger or biker all the way through the heart of the region. From the base of Mt. Rainier all the way to Sumner the Foothills Trail is a reality after years of work. From Tacoma to Puyallup that trail ends at the eastern side of Puyallup. Less than five miles are missing to connect three major trail systems and all are within the Valley Cities area. What a legacy for our children and their grandchildren, and all of it is within our reach.

State Route 167 is another kind of corridor as well, and thanks to a grant obtained by our Congressional Representative Adam Smith, the Valley Cities are exploring the possibility of connecting our communities with fiber optic. Yes, fiber optic for our business and public safety needs, and for our residential communities the possibility of fiber optic and wireless capability throughout a region.

Partnerships are vital to our community and the South King County Area Transportation Board is another with cities from Auburn and Milton to SeaTac, Burien, Des Moines and Renton all working together on transportation projects that effect us all.

We also work in partnership with the Suburban Cities Association, which makes up over 37 cities and represents 743,000 people. Five of your City Council members sit on these key committees for King County and the Puget Sound Regional Council:

Nancy Backus serves on the King County Growth Management Planning Council.

Lynn Norman serves on the Puget Sound Regional Council's Growth Management Policy Board

Bill Peloza serves on the King County Regional Water Quality Committee, as well as the Metropolitan Solid Waste Advisory Committee; King County Metropolitan Water Pollution Abatement Advisory Committee and King County Green/Duwamish Watershed Committee.

Sue Singer serves as Vice President of the Puget Sound Regional Council's (PSRC) Executive Board. She also Chairs the Operations

Committee that oversees federal transportation grants and the Clean Water and Clean Air Acts.

Roger Thordarson serves on the King County Regional Transit Committee.

I am the Chair Suburban Cities Issues Committee and sit on the Board of Directors.

Yet, we are not just a King County City and Councilmembers Gene Cerino and Rich Wagner sit on the Pierce County Regional Council committees and their transportation committees like RAMP, the Puyallup River and Lake Tapps committees so vital to our own future.

We will continue our partnership with state organizations like the Association of Washington Cities and federal committees like the representation given by our City Councilmembers on key committees of the National League of Cities, with Nancy Backus on Finance, Administration and Intergovernmental Relations Policy Committee. Roger Thordarson on the Human Development Policy Committee and Bill Peloza on the Energy, Environmental and Natural Resources Committee.

We work in many forums, from the citizen next door to the businesses on the block, in partnerships with cities and agencies to state and federal bodies, and we will continue our policy of partnership.

We will lead where our leadership is required. We will walk in partnership when we can, and We will follow when necessary.

While the problems remain there are so many opportunities in 2006, and working together in this New Year we can make our home, our Auburn, so Much More Than We Imagined.